

**Approved as amended by the Board of Selectmen
TOWN OF DARIEN
BOARD OF SELECTMEN
SPECIAL MEETING
MAY 9, 2006**

ATTENDANCE: First Selectwoman Evonne Klein; Kevin Newman;
Linda Santarella; Barbara Thorne; Susan Young

STAFF: John Crary, Administrative Officer

OTHERS: Peggy McLaughlin, Health Director

CALL TO ORDER

First Selectwoman Klein called the Special Meeting to order at 9:15 p.m.

NEW BUSINESS

a) Discuss the formation of a new health district with the Town of New Canaan

The First Selectwoman asked that the Board formulate pros and cons about forming a Health District with New Canaan. She stated that they had a lot of their questions answered and asked if there were any remaining questions or if anything was unclear. Mr. Crary stated that pertaining to the questions about New Canaan's numbers, he would obtain them.

Mr. Newman stated that Dr. Reed talked about part time and he asked what part time meant? He also asked what percentage of time is spent by the doctors planning now and could they see what they were getting. Dr. Peggy McLaughlin replied that 50% of her time will be spent doing the activities. Ms. Santarella asked if New Canaan had held a public information meeting and if there was any input from New Canaan residents. Dr. McLaughlin said they had not and they need to take the show on the road. Ms. Klein stated that they did with Norwalk and New Canaan and that New Canaan's Town Counsel does support it. Ms. Santarella questioned that in a report from Mr. Crary he stated that local control was minor. Mr. Crary replied that they were transferring responsibility from one Board to another and that instead of this Board being the overseer, it will be delegated to another group. Mr. Newman stated that the memo of understanding could be considered as a pro and a con. He asked that the memo of understanding should be explained at the next public hearing. He stated that on the plus side there was the ability to have Peggy in a full time position to think of things that they do not do now. He added that on the negative side he felt that the money was top heavy and that it evaporates before it hits the bottom ground. He stated that it looks like a bureaucracy and he would like to see actual benefits flowing for the people. Ms. Young

stated that the presentation slide on staffing was not persuasive. Mr. Crary stated that in terms of increases, there would be 1 full time Director versus 2 part-time Directors. As far as level of services, he pointed out that in the budget, there will be extra funds available, if needed, to expand services or to not be used at all.

Mr. Newman commented that it took New Canaan six years to get here and we are doing this in six weeks, which made him a little nervous. He stated that the double dipping bonus grants were not worth making a mistake. Ms. Klein explained that this was going to be on the RTM's agenda on May 22nd for a vote on June 1st in order to be able to make the cutoff date for the double dip grant money. Ms. Thorne stated that she wanted the numbers to come out right also and she was convinced that they were close. She added that service was her main motivator. She said that this was parallel to the way the IT Department and Board of Education work in job sharing expertise. She commented that she would like to see one person on hand with a disaster plan. Mr. Newman stated that New Canaan made a comment that they felt they could be better, but they were not broken. He said a logical question to ask would be to figure out if they have a real need to do this and find out if it is a more pressing need. Ms. Santarella responded that was why she asked if they held a public informational meeting because she wanted to know what the New Canaan residents were thinking.

Ms. Klein stated that the question was all about improving services. She continued that they were now a ½ time department and how could the Town improve the services to the people. She stated that it was a great opportunity to take control of what they would like to do and she sees it as a level of safety and protection. Dr. McLaughlin stated that if they do not form a health district, what were they going to do? Ms. Klein said that in last year's budget they did not fill a position because of too much overtime. She said that now that they know that they are obligated to do better for people that live in the Town, they are faced with basic questions on how to improve services to the community. She said should it either be a health district or should they fight for a full time department. Ms. Klein asked what were the priorities, what were they going to do, and what will it cost the Town.

Ms. Young questioned whether they have a place at the Emergency Management table. Dr. McLaughlin replied that Mark McEwan represented the Town and attended meetings. Ms. Young said they are sitting at the Emergency Management table and not able to comply because the Town does not have the money or the time. She reported that the State makes demands yet they are giving only \$1.66 this year. She said that if they go forward with this, they need to be realistic because historically the money from the State may go down or may not be sustained at all. Mr. Newman stated that he discounts the grants from the State completely and he is skeptical about them. Ms. Klein said she would like to see data that the State money has gone down. Ms. Santarella asked if there were any stipulations with the grants and Ms. McLaughlin replied it was by the size of population. Mr. Newman stated that his biggest concern was that it was an emotional issue washing over the rational issue. He then stated that he was supportive of local

control but in regard to services, New Canaan might do it one way and Darien might do it another way. He liked the Town deciding its own issues.

Mr. Newman stated that it was not necessary for the Board to vote on this because it was the Town's decision. He continued that he wanted to make sure the process was enough and that the benefits were there. Ms. Young reported that Greenwich pays \$32.00 per person for healthcare and that the number goes up considering what the Town provides in services. She stated that when they go into this they will be starting at the bottom of the barrel providing minimum services. She said it is at the beginning and not where they want to be. Ms. Klein stated that they should have a needs assessment of individual people to provide the services that the community wants to have.

Rob Young from the RTM stated he needs convincing as to how the Town is going to get more services because it will be doubling the population, tripling the area to be covered, and increasing the number of inspections. Ms. Young stated that they should improve the slide presentation showing what the services are. Mr. Newman stated that they will be paying eight times as much money in salaries and the numbers are staggering high for the same per capita coverage. Mr. Rob Young reiterated that he was not convinced the services would be better. Dr. McLaughlin stated that the services would be increased because there would be four full time sanitariums who will inspect food, septic systems, wells, pools and nail salons. There is now one person to do that.

Ms. Klein then asked the Board if they would like to vote on the formation of a health district with New Canaan tonight. Ms. Santarella said she did even though the statute did not require them to do so. She continued that at the second meeting she was present at, things took off quickly and she did not yet get a sense from the Committee where they were. She also said she had a little difficulty with the loss of control. Ms. Klein stated that the Board was scheduled to vote at a Special Meeting on May 15.

Mr. Newman stated that he would be delighted to vote but he did not feel the need to vote on this. He stated he was not in favor of it and it was not a good trade. He said they have to talk a lot more to make up his mind, but he did feel a little better with it. He felt it was a rush for him by pushing for the double dip grant deadline. He said he needed to be convinced of the additional services and he wanted to come to grips with it slowly, but he was not close-minded about it.

Ms. Young believed it was important that the Committee bring it forward and this was a bigger issue than an individual one. She stated that when she asked for the numbers each time the numbers changed. She stated that she would like to be totally convinced that the services are going to be better. She asked that the group slow down and not worry about the double dip grant. She said that they need to be comfortable with this in the way that New Canaan is comfortable and she thought it was a timing issue. She said that she needed evidence and time to see that this is the best thing for the Town. Ms. Santarella

stated that New Canaan was very happy to slow the process down but it was accelerated because Ms. Klein said it should move forward. Ms. Klein replied that she said that so they could begin the process with a public informational meeting and hear what the people had to say.

Ms. Thorne stated that it was important for the Board to make a stand and whether it was before or after the RTM meeting was immaterial. She said she would be happy to go with the Health District or a full district of their own. She preferred not to stay with the current services because they need to do better. Ms. Klein stated that she would like to see the Board take a position on this when they are ready to do so. She felt it would work and serve the Town very well. She continued that they would have the upper hand in negotiations and whatever the Board decided, they will talk on how to do it better. She stated that she would take the item off the agenda of May 15th meeting.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

- May 15, 2006 Special Meeting at 7:00 p.m.
- June 5, 2006 Regular Meeting at 7:00 p.m.

**** MS. SANTARELLA MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 11:05 PM.**
**** MS. YOUNG SECONDED.**
**** MOTION PASSED UNANIMOUSLY.**

Respectfully Submitted,

Donna DeVito
Telesco Secretarial Services